

We are hearing numerous conversations around unity today especially within our denomination. What does Christian unity mean? Christian unity does not mean being united around issues no matter how important the issue, but united in the mission of Jesus Christ. "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV.

Christian unity does not come from uniformity around social issues or denominational unity. It is not what we do on the outside that makes for unity, but how the Spirit is working in our hearts. It is not our responsibility to create unity; it is the Spirit of God who brings unity. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:3 NIV. It is the Christian's responsibility to preserve the unity by walking in a manner worthy of God's calling. It is not organizational unity that drives us, but unity in Christ.

The unity the Holy Spirit brings is our belief and understanding in Jesus Christ and growing in Jesus Christ. Our ultimate goal is Christ-likeness, and the ultimate purpose of unity is to glorify God. To live in unity, we must live humble before God, gentle before others and in the love of Christ.

The world continues to seek ways of creating laws and guidelines to preserve unity and peace. But it will always fall short. Unity and peace can only happen in relationship to God through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:23 NIV. As we live united by the Spirit, we reflect Jesus Christ in the world. As we reflect Jesus in the world, we continue his work and mission. The work of Jesus is always reconciliation to God first and to one another. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore ambassadors." II Corinthians 5:17-20a NIV. As we continue to allow the mind that was in Christ dwell in us, then we will see the peace and unity of the Spirit in our communities and throughout the world.

As we prepare to come together as a district, in the conversation around The Way Forward, please be in prayer and meditate on the scriptures in this letter. Listed below are the dates we will gather.